

"Paula Saneux, An Artist Who Tells Stories to Her Audience, "Professional Artist Magazine,"  
Artist interview by Adrian Alexander. December 2017/January 2018

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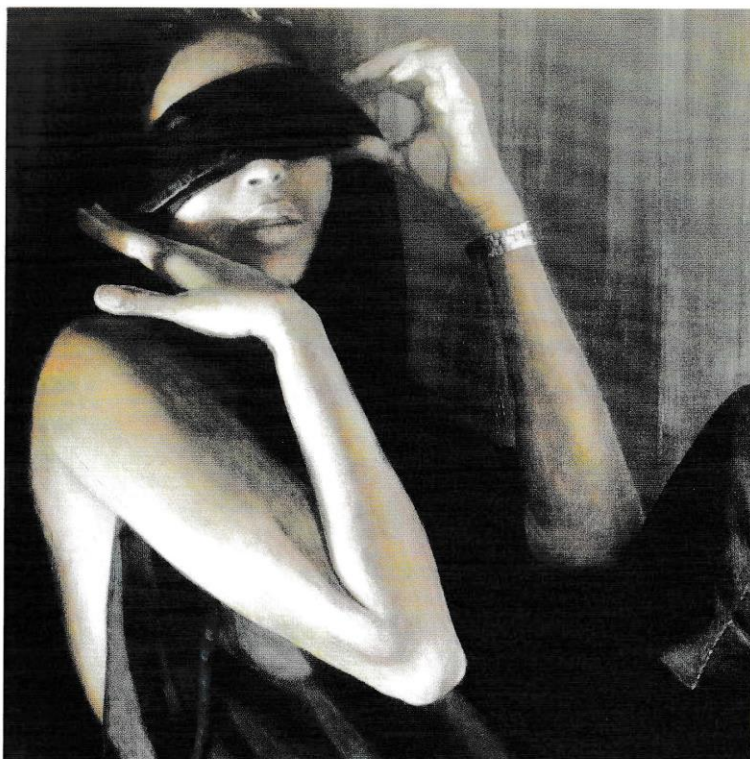
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## Paula Saneaux

### An Artist Who Tells Stories to Her Audience

BY ADRIAN ALEXANDER

**T**he struggle of the artist is a theme that's very pervasive in our culture. It's difficult to live and work as an artist in a world that doesn't always seem to value art. But how much more difficult must it be for an artist who's also an immigrant?

Paula Saneaux was born in the Dominican Republic and always knew how to work hard, a trait that would come in handy when she arrived in the States. But long before that, she had been propelled by votes of confidence from people in her homeland.

When asked how she got her start, Saneaux said, "It was because of my mom mostly. She was an architect, and she would always draw her flats, and one day I copied her and drew the flat of a house. She saw it and she said that I was good with proportions. I didn't know what she meant then, but now I understand." Her mother may have been the first to recognize her talent, but



she certainly wouldn't be the last.

After years of hard work in school, she received a scholarship to college where she expected to study architecture like her mother. But her professors saw her talent and convinced her she should be working in fine art instead. These votes of confidence led her to joining Altos de Chavón, a school in the Dominican Republic that's associated with Parsons School of Design, and she never looked back.

#### COMING TO AMERICA

Altos de Chavón is an art school from which students can acquire an associate's degree. It's not a direct pipeline into Parsons, but some students go on from there to study at either the Parsons campus in Paris or New York. Saneaux decided to go to New York.

Was transitioning to America difficult for her? "Oh my God, Yes! In my country, I studied English at an institution called [Instituto Cultural] Dominico Americano, so I thought OK, I got this, I know English. But there it was very difficult because it's not the same." What Saneaux learned is what any non-native speaker understands: Knowing how to read and write in a different language for academic purposes is not the same as knowing how speak in that language conversationally.

In her first venture to America, Saneaux had to contend with a language barrier and cultural differences, but

1 Watch, 2016, by Paula Saneaux. Acrylic on canvas, 20" x 20". Copyright © 2016 Paula Saneaux. Used by permission of the artist. 2 The one who goes next, 2010, by Paula Saneaux. Acrylic on canvas, 30" x 36". Copyright © 2010 Paula Saneaux. Used by permission of the artist.



the difficulties didn't end there. There was still the necessity of creating art. Primarily a figurative artist, she found it difficult to find her niche at a school focused on design. "Parsons respects figurative art, and they push you to take it to another level, but they're mostly interested in abstract art and conceptual art." Saneaux considers herself a contemporary figurative artist. In that sense, her time at Parsons was difficult because she had to find a way to be true to her own art form while also being open to what they were trying to teach her about abstract and conceptual art.

How did Saneaux overcome that particular difficulty? Instead of changing her art to conform to what Parsons expected, she accompanied the images with a story or dialogue (always in English) that could explain her subject matter in terms that her teachers would understand. Her flare for storytelling continues to shine in her work today. Each of her collections is accompanied by text telling the story of the collection. When asked how this helps her art, Saneaux said, "I have tools to talk to different audiences. Not just the people who are familiar with my work."

### A DIFFERENT KIND OF IMMIGRANT STORY

In January 2016, Saneaux received the USA EB1-1 Green Card for "Artists of Extraordinary Ability." This means that based on the quality of her art, she was granted the ability to remain in the United States and work as a fulltime artist. Only one percent of the people who apply for this particular Green Card are ever granted it. According to Saneaux, "They usually give it to people who have earned a Nobel Prize, or they're very famous athletes or they have discovered something very important. So, you have to prove that you are worthy to receive a Green Card from the States based only on your art."

Having come to the States to be a fulltime artist, Saneaux found herself in the position of having to run her art business from a foreign land. To prepare, she said,

“‘Work hard, work with passion, and everything will come by default,’ I always try to go back to that thought. ~ Paula Saneaux

"I read books, I've read the [*Professional Artist*] magazine for a long time, since 2007, it's helped me a lot!"

She was lucky early on to get representation with a gallery in the Dominican Republic, but now, she sells all of her paintings herself through her website. When asked if she still sells more paintings back home than she does in the States, Saneaux said, "All my clients are around the world. Thanks to the internet."

Her global reach sometimes makes running her social media channels challenging. "Sometimes I do get overwhelmed, but what I do is I always go back to the reason that I started painting. And I always try to remember, and I have it on the wall, to 'Work hard, work with passion, and everything will come by default,' I always try to

go back to that thought."

Talking to Saneaux, I was struck by her optimism, her passion and her story of hard work and dedication to her craft. Her advice for artists just starting out includes: "Don't read too much about the art world because you can get intimidated, upset or overconfident. What is 'in' now can be out tomorrow, and vice versa. That's why you have to do what you believe in. Work hard, work with passion, and everything will come by default." **PA**

You can learn more about Paula Saneaux and see more examples of her art on her website [paulasaneaux.com](http://paulasaneaux.com).

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31 Aphra and her Daughter, 2007, by Paula Saneaux. Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 60". Copyright © 2007 Paula Saneaux. Used by permission of the artist.